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ABSTRACT

Adolescents are extremely interested in their cultural sex roles, relationships, changing bodies, changing relationships with parents and with members of the opposite sex, value patterns, and careers. Their reading interests are closely related to their emotional interests. Teachers need to be aware of the complexities of adolescent life and redesign their teaching techniques to cope with them. The degree to which students feel they can control their own destiny has a significant impact on their motivation. Teachers can modify their methods or styles of feedback to enhance student self-esteem by assessing student behavior, identifying reasons for that behavior, and implementing changes with those behaviors in mind. Such an approach might include instruction in increments that allow frequent success, and feedback that is immediate and specific to the student's response. Appropriate activities for improving motivation include letting students choose their own books, assigning creative projects instead of book reports, and providing sources for reading other than books, such as magazines and comic books. (HTH)

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METHODS FOR MOTIVATION

Grades 7-9

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DIVISION OF READING EFFECTIVENESS
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METHODS FOR MOTIVATION

A Focus

Terry Ley reported a survey made by the National Opinion Research Center which presented some unsettling results:

- *approximately 10% of our population reads approximately 80% of the books read,
- *about one-half of the adult population of the U.S. has never read a book all the way through,
- *less than one out of five adults could name a book they would like to read.¹

Small wonder that teachers say motivating students to read is of major concern to them!

Motivation is analyzed at professional workshops, in journals, and during discussions between parents, teachers and involved students. This monograph offers some thoughts about motivation and some activities for use in the classroom.

Don Charles tells us that people "...learn because they want to or need to..."² Unfortunately, many junior high students do not want or perceive the need for the skills we are offering to teach them. It is a gross understatement to say that this adolescent period is a complex period in life. As teachers of these students, we must be aware of these complexities and redesign our techniques to cope with them.

According to G. Robert Carlsen (Books and the Teenage Reader, Bantam) today's adolescents, like those of preceeding generations, appears to be extremely interested in:

- *discovering their respective sex roles in our culture,
- *developing new relationships with people their own age,
- *achieving an easy relationship with members of the opposite sex,
- *accepting their physical bodies,
- *changing their relationships with their parents,
- *working for pay,
- *finding a vocation, and
- *becoming aware of their value patterns.

We are dealing with consuming needs which leave little room for demands from the classroom. We need to be aware that the reading interests of adolescents are going to be closely related to their emotional needs.

A PROCESS

Assess

Realizing that we must tap into the adolescent's energy stream almost "on the sly," we can organize our efforts beyond the methods described in the standard teachers' manual. First, assess the total situation as it exists in each different classroom. Describe the behaviors you see. Mager suggests that we carry a small notebook during this assessment period. Note that Joe always sleeps during class; Bob never completes a lesson but often starts on it; Karen visits with her neighbors whenever possible and Cindy doodles constantly. On the positive side, you might also note that Tom always carries his text and knows what lesson is being covered; Carolyn participates in each class discussion and Michael dreams up creative projects to suggest.

Next, identify reasons you perceive for the actions you have described. Perhaps there are some specific results you could note, as well. Does Joe have a heavy after-school job? Is Bob able to study at home? Has he a study hall? Could Cindy really be following her interest in art as a career? Does Karen need much more attention than she gets either at home or at school? These questions help you assess the behavior you are describing. They can also aid you in the "plan of action" you design.

Plan

In designing a plan, consider alternatives to the existing behaviors. Could one or two students be the keys to the rest of the class? Could you approach them first? What is the worst thing that could happen as a result of the existing situation? What is the best thing that could happen?

Now, identify changes that you feel need to be made. Begin with yourself. You can have the greatest impact on yourself and that is a logical place to start. Next, specify changes to be made by students. If Karen is to stop chatting constantly, what alternative to that socialization is available to her? It has to be an option she sees as satisfying her own needs, even if she has not thoroughly understood what those needs are.

Finally, plan some changes in the environment which will facilitate the other changes you wish to make. Reorganize the room, add color to the walls, bring in an outside speaker, or rearrange the study schedule you are all used to. In some cases, you could involve parents. Could they find you a couch for the room? Provide paint? Be the outside speaker? Enlist all the helpful sources you can think of as you design your plan of action.

A POSITIVE APPROACH

It has been found that key student attitudes are related to self-concept. The degree to which students feel they can control their own destiny has a significant impact on their motivation. Alschuler says, "Students who believe that fate, chance, and luck are more important than hard work do less well."³ Feedback from teacher to student enhances or diminishes self-concept. Teachers can modify their methods or styles of feedback to obtain positive rather than negative results.

Young students are often positively motivated by parental attention, personal curiosity, or teacher's praise. Older students may find other reasons for working at a task. Grades may become important to future educational plans. Social approval may now come more from their peers than authority figures. The mental intrigue may become an end in itself. However, even these motivators may lose their potency when they are too far removed from the behavior -- or when the behavior is too far above the student's ability to achieve a high enough success rate. In selecting an extrinsic motivator, observe the activities the person does most frequently when there are no constraints. You may note talking with friends, doodling, relaxing or strong physical action. These may become attractive reinforcers for a specific behavior. An older student might find release time from study hall to tutor another person highly motivating.

Intrinsic rewards grow from success in learning. They are also longer lasting rewards which encourage a student to develop inde-

pendence and maturity. Ken Dulin (University of Wisconsin) reminds us that "Nothing succeeds like self-perceived success." Student awareness of progress usually serves as an intrinsic motivator. We can improve our students' contact with the subjects we teach. We can improve the atmosphere in which we teach. And we can model the kinds of behavior we would like to see in our students.

Mager suggests guidelines to help a teacher accentuate positive approaches.

- *Provide instruction in increments that allow success MOST of the time.
- *Elicit learning responses in private rather than publicly as often as possible.
- *Provide feedback that is immediate and specific to the student's response.
- *Treat the student as a person rather than as a member of a faceless mass.
- *Use active rather than passive words during presentations.
- *Express genuine interest in seeing the student succeed.
- *Use only those test items relevant to your objectives.⁴

Usually teachers can follow through on these suggestions by re-focusing their attention on half-buried skills previously developed or by stressing facets of their classroom personalities which already exist. The results will be a more satisfying educational experience for all concerned.

An Activity or Two

Teachers often feel frustrated by the success of television in communicating with youngsters. Frustrated, because after glimpses of underwater life -- in color, "Schoolhouse Rock" to teach grammar and a journey into Dickens' novels, how can teachers compete in an ordinary classroom?

First of all, consider the suggestion that we NOT compete. We are not TV producers with huge staffs and budgets to match. What we do have, television cannot offer. We have responsiveness. We can react to each individual in our room at the specific moment she/he needs reaction. We can answer questions RIGHT NOW. We can share the personal sides of learning in a way TV will never capture.

Next, let us show we do care about those individuals in the desks in front of us. Add the element of enthusiasm consistent with our personalities. How can we motivate others if we do not appear involved?

Finally, try activities to alter the pattern of the period. Reverse the expected. Rearrange, regroup and rethink the next unit. Perhaps some of these ideas will hit just the right note with your next class!

* * * * *

Students at a Bayside, New York, middle school offered these ideas for motivating readers:

- *Let us choose our own books.
- *Suggest names of interesting stories.
- *Let us read along with taped stories.

- *Assign creative projects instead of book reports.
- *Let us read comic books, magazines and newspapers.
- *Take us to the school library.
- *Bring appropriate book clubs to the attention of the students.
- *Prepare teacher and/or student annotated book lists.
- *Let us read at our own pace.⁵

*Since junior high students enjoy owning their own books, contracts and inexpensive paperbacks can be rewards to encourage free reading. Here is the format for the project:

- 1) Student chooses a book from a prepared list and reads.
- 2) Teacher provides questions about the chosen book.
- 3) Student answers all questions correctly.
- 4) Teacher returns signed contract to student.
- 5) When 5 contracts are collected they may be redeemed for a free book. No limits are placed on the number a student can earn.

*Present paperback books as rewards. Choose topics consistent with the analysis of needs you did at the beginning of the assessment project. (Sports books are declining in popularity.)

*Offer alternatives to the traditional, written book report by substituting some of these ideas during the year.

*Organize small groups who will report, orally, to each other. Stimulate round table discussion about the similarities or differences in books read. The teacher sits in, informally, during the discussions. Consider a time limit for each reviewer.

*Play charades with the main characters in a book studied by several students.

*Prepare commercials and include art work to sell the class on the book.

*Try riddles to guess aspects of the story line. These are more effective in small groups.

*Books are only one source of reading materials. Encourage students to enjoy cartoons, amusing jokes or brief human interest stories from alternative sources. Clip items and mount them on file cards or construction paper. Display them on a table, in a notebook or on a special bulletin board. You will find that they generate discussions -- and as confidence grows -- students will try creative efforts along the same lines.

*Cover a bulletin board with white paper or newsprint to make a "Graffiti Board." Use water-base markers or crayons for students to write comments in words or pictures, brief or intricate detail, positive or negative terms. After each comes the book's title and author.

*Panel discussions can be designed where students examine problems faced by main characters in a particular book. They could analyze environment, motivation and character traits which lead to specific actions. They could also suggest alternatives to those actions considering a change in any of the contributing factors.

*Compare different editions of the same book. Examine style, illustrations, actual adherence to story line. Consider making a student version of the book.

*Offer a small "announcement" of progress which can be posted on a bulletin board for all to see. Make sure all students receive at least one. Such announcements should not be for perfect papers but for improvements.

*Read aloud to students of any age. Share a book you particularly like and your enthusiasm will be contagious.

*Stimulate class discussion using a timely "Quote-of-the-day." Use a quote to highlight an author, provoke thought or to explain a period concept. Time gaps are often bridged this way.

*Have individuals prepare a story for a much younger class. Make sure the story is on the level of the younger class!

*Teenagers love to eat! Interest in a historic period could be sparked by examining some of the customs related to eating and by tasting particular dishes. A complete Roman banquet is commonly used by Latin clubs, however, sampling French pastries may be more realistic in the regular classroom.

*Nicholas P. Criscuolo suggests using a phone book to spark reading. Type tasks similar to the following on individual index cards and have each student choose a card. Finished information could be gathered into a class book.

- 1) List people whose last names are colors.
(Jennifer Green)
- 2) List those whose last names are also girls' names.
(Steven Joyce)

- 3) List people whose last names are the same as boys.
(Adrienne James)
- 4) List those with occupations for last names.
(Todd Carpenter)
- 5) List those with "famous" names.
(Jimmy Carter)⁶

*Cut out different sections of a newspaper and mount on construction paper. Label "Editorial," "Ad," as well as headlines, facts and human interest stories. Have students contribute their articles and discuss.

*Use cut-up cartoon strips from the Sunday newspaper (Sunday for color) to reinforce various sequencing and comprehension skills. Glue the strip on an old manila folder, cover with clear contact and then cut it apart. Store in small envelopes with the title printed or pasted on the front. Be alert for current popular strips and encourage student additions to the collection.

*"Who's Who" of each class. Use a loose leaf notebook with a page for each person. The individual lists hobbies, some personal information (you guide this), and the kinds of books she/he enjoys reading. Keep the pages in alphabetical order and encourage students to refer to them. Interest groups could be developed using this reference.

*Resource information could be researched on local issues using newspapers and city media. Citizens' groups could be interviewed. Sharing the information so gathered might be done at a round table forum including cross-examination by the audience. This could also build a local awareness in a time of more transient families.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Terry C. Ley, "Getting Kids Into Books: The Importance of Individualized Reading," Media and Methods (March, 1979), p. 22.
- ²Don C. Charles, Psychology of the Child in the Classroom (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1964), p. 15.
- ³Alfred S. Alschuler, Developing Achievement Motivation in Adolescents: Education for Human Growth (New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications, 1973), p. 44.
- ⁴Robert T. Mager, Developing Attitude Toward Learning (Palo Alto, California: Fearon Publishers, 1968).
- ⁵Donna Brutton, "How to Develop and Maintain Student Interest in Reading," English Journal (November, 1974).
- ⁶Nicholas P. Criscuolo, "Twelve Strategies for Retrieving the Alienated Reader," Media and Methods (November, 1979).

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